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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 53/195 of 18 February 1999, on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). Among the principal concerns of the resolution were "a coordinated approach to training and research"; the strengthening of the Institute's cooperation with other United Nations institutes and relevant national, regional and international institutes; the need for enhanced coordination between the main training and research institutions of the United Nations system; and an assessment of a survey on various United Nations training programmes prepared by the Institute. In the resolution the General Assembly welcomed progress made in building partnerships between the Institute and other parts of the United Nations system but underlined the need to develop further and expand the scope of these partnerships, particularly at the country level. Moreover, the resolution welcomes, in its preambular section, the successful restructuring of the Institute, including recent progress made in improved cooperation with the United Nations system, and addresses issues of management and funding. The present report focuses on further progress in the Institute's cooperation with partner organizations of the United Nations system and on providing an assessment of the survey conducted by the Institute.[1]

2. The report of the Secretary-General on the programme of reform of 14 July 1997 (A/51/950) set in motion a process within the United Nations aimed at coordinating and rationalizing research and training functions. Action was needed to remedy problems of proliferation and fragmentation in a number of areas.[2] Recent steps taken by the Secretary-General in this area, notably with respect to UNITAR and other training programmes destined for national officials, are part of this process, as is the main thrust of resolution 53/195. The present report reveals that while progress is being made in forging new cooperative links in the field of training, more effort is required to avoid overlap and duplication of effort. Moreover, firmer mechanisms are needed to exploit fully the complementarities and synergies in the area of training.

II. Complementarities and synergies

3. The training institutions within the United Nations that are oriented towards training national officials can be divided roughly into three categories:

(a) The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) was established as an autonomous organ by resolution of the General Assembly. Its purpose is broad, encompassing peace and security as well as economic and social development. Most of its activities are focused on training personnel from Member States, while research

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has become focused on and for training. All staff are trainers. Original and often successful training methodologies and didactic materials are developed and disseminated, with growing use of modern information and communication techniques. UNITAR is now self-funded;

(b) Different United Nations entities, particularly the regional commissions, have also established centres with specific and sometimes technical training objectives in areas such as planning, demography, and statistics. Their staff are specialized, and their funding sources are either the regular budget of the entities that have established them, subsidies from host countries, voluntary contribution or a mixture of the above;

(c) Training activities that are collateral to ongoing programmes, either to facilitate the introduction and dissemination of legal norms or of improved management techniques, and are conducted by units primarily devoted to other functions. Their staff may be called upon to act as resource persons, but the functions of the units concerned do not necessarily involve the development of training methodologies or training-related research. Often, the training component is funded from the overall budget of the ongoing programme.

4. Progress has been made in strengthening cooperation between the Institute and other programmes, as noted in the resolution 53/195, but there is room for further progress. It is useful to bear in mind that the broader the scope of a particular training programme, the stronger the need for effective cooperation. This may require bringing together programmes from within and outside the United Nations system, as is the case in some of UNITAR's activities. Such partnerships can be so close as to entail formal joint sponsorship by the heads of the concerned agencies. An example in this respect is the training and capacity-building programme on chemicals, which involves UNEP, UNITAR, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and, more recently, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Another is the course on international migration policies and law, which is a joint venture of UNFPA, UNITAR, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and, recently, the ILO. Several other examples could be cited.

5. Cooperation may take different forms, ranging from the simple exchange of information to joint programmes (for example, between the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNITAR, for the International Law Fellowship Programme; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and UNITAR for commercial diplomacy). It may also involve a partnership between a donor and an executing agency. In some cases cooperation is formalized through a memorandum of understanding.

6. Cooperation is increasing in the effort to apply modern information and communication technologies. CD-ROMs have been published and distributed, free of charge, to hundreds of scientists in developing countries. Training and capacity-building programmes have been developed in the use of geographic information systems, with the aim of facilitating the flow of institutional and scientific information among various national and regional actors. The use of the Internet has further enhanced these outreach efforts.

7. Joint programmes have been introduced in developing countries, particularly in Africa, for better assessment of their environmental situation, particularly in connection with the three conventions generated by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The secretariats of the environmental conventions are assisting UNITAR directly. The World Bank is supporting the programme and the International Telecommunication Union is associated with it, as are other partners within, and beyond the United Nations system.

8. UNITAR has designed and developed programmes with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and others. The training materials were prepared on the basis of internationally recognized documentation on environmental issues. To achieve maximum multiplier effects, the materials were oriented for the training of trainers and include a complete package required to organize workshops, including a full curriculum, training modules, visual aids, support notes for the trainer, exercises with instructions and a bibliography. The materials are designed for application in developing countries and can be adapted to meet specific needs of individual countries.

9. The essential feature of such cooperative efforts is that they are started in a pragmatic and concrete manner with the aim of eventually attracting the interest and association of other partners. They are funded from different sources and follow different modalities but remain joint ventures, sharing costs and benefits. All involve cooperation among entities and programmes of the United Nations Organization and the system at large. The synergies derive from the diversity of interest and specialization of the partners.

10 . In summary, it is evident on the basis of recent experience that further potential exists to strengthen cooperation and take advantage of synergies. Given the priority being attached to the training of governmental officials and the limited funding available, even better levels of cooperation are required.

III. Assessment of the survey

11. This section responds to paragraph 8 of resolution 53/192, in which the Secretary-General is requested to prepare an assessment of the survey prepared by UNITAR,[1] "with a view to highlighting the lessons learned from the responses already received, providing a qualitative assessment of pedagogical methods ... and highlighting the complementarities and synergies that were apparent in the survey".

12. In assessing the UNITAR survey, it is important to bear in mind that the focus was the training of personnel from Member States by entities within the United Nations. The survey had several intentional limitations: it did not cover the United Nations system at large, including programmes offered by the United Nations Staff College; it did not cover training programmes for United Nations staff; it focused on training and did not deal with research conducted by United Nations research institutes or departments.

13. Within this circumscribed focus, the survey provides brief short descriptions of a wide range of training programmes offered to Member States by United Nations funds, programmes, and entities. The information was collected by means of a simple questionnaire; all institutes and programmes contacted for the survey responded. The information thus obtained is presented under a heading for each responding institution and programme, covering general information, the substance of the programme, pedagogical methodologies, training material, established cooperative links and evaluation. The nature of the information so presented does not lend itself easily to a comparative analysis or definitive conclusions on which future policy might be based. Instead, the survey should be considered as a useful initial review, carried out within available resources. It provides an overview of the range of programmes offered by the United Nations and merits being updated periodically, possibly with greater use of information technology.

14. The survey does permit the following initial conclusions to be drawn:

(a) Training provided for governmental officials and, increasingly, for civil society representatives, constitutes an important part of United Nations activity. At the same time, it is difficult to make a conclusive assessment of the actual size of this effort. The survey estimates expenditures at $65 million per year. If one were to include training offered by UNDP through its country programmes, the total would be higher. The growth of this type of programme is attributed to recognition by various organizations that they have an opportunity and responsibility to offer these services to Governments;

(b) The prevalent pattern of financing these training programmes appears in great part to be extrabudgetary. This provides incentives to focus on the kind of training for which there is strong demand and to deliver the best performance, in order to establish credibility and ensure continuity in operations. But it also results in financial instability, or at least fragility, which tends to hinder the development of original training methodologies and material and limit the programme's scope;

(c) Although programmes vary widely in content, duration, target group and location, many appear to be directed at training trainers, so as to achieve a maximum effect;

(d) While most training programmes seem to contain some type of evaluation, it is not possible to discern from the survey what assessment and evaluation means are employed, how systematically they are used and how much cooperation there is in sharing methods and conclusions. Moreover, the survey does not provide information on how the evaluation results were used to improve programmes;

(e) Pragmatic cooperative links are used by a number of training programmes and institutions, although the extent and depth of this cooperation and the results achieved are not fully apparent from the survey;

(f) A considerable amount of data is being compiled in organizing and implementing training programmes that could be drawn upon to shed light on the impact of training, and on broader questions of identifying effective methodologies for the transfer of skills and knowledge in a multicultural setting.

15. The UNITAR survey does not offer any pedagogical quality assessment, and it is not clear that a generally accepted framework for this type of analysis exists. Moreover, on the basis of the data contained in the survey, it is not possible to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the pedagogical methodologies now used. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn on this score.

16. Subject to the availability of resources, it might be desirable to extend the survey to include the United Nations system at large in order to tap a broader body of substantive and comparative knowledge of practices within the system than could be identified in this more limited survey.

17. The distinction between free-standing training institutions and those involved in research may be difficult to draw in all cases, since these two dimensions of United Nations work are often closely linked, particularly in training concerning the normative and research activities of the Organization.

18. Evaluation seems to be a prevalent practice in these training efforts. The survey does not make clear, however, what specific assessment and evaluation tools are employed, how systematically they are used or how much cooperation in sharing methods and conclusions may exist. Thus, available data do not permit an assessment of the quality of the programmes. Moreover, while most programmes contain some type of evaluation, it is not possible to discern from the survey whether these evaluations have resulted in improved programmes.

19. On the subject of cooperative links, the survey shows a broad range of practical arrangements. The scope, intensity and sustainability of cooperation vary greatly, however, depending on programme orientations and institutional settings. The extent to which it is a systematic practice is not clear from the survey. More precise data on formal cooperative links might be helpful. Overall, it would seem that cooperation is mostly of an informal nature. An example of such informal cooperation is the use by UNITAR and UNDP of a programme module developed by ITU (Train-X).

IV. Implications for further studies

20. Although the UNITAR survey provides a good overview of training programmes offered to Member States by the United Nations, a broader study, requiring additional resources, would be needed to obtain a complete and accurate picture of such training within the entire United Nations system. A wider survey could:

(a) Cover the United Nations system as a whole, including the specialized agencies, in order to identify all relevant cooperative programmes and potentials for further synergies;

(b) Collect more precise structural data on training institutions, including specific projects and programmes, numbers of trainers and managers, breakdown of training personnel into part-time and full-time, managerial and instructional location of programmes and the existence and composition of advisory bodies;

(c) Describe the profile of participants, including quantitative information, educational level of participants, nature of current employment, affiliation to Governments, non-governmental organizations or other international organizations, level of training, location and involvement in previous programmes;

(d) Provide financial and funding information broken down into various categories, such as overall and per participant cost, overhead, sources and amount of financing, including contributions by participants;

(e) Report information regarding the type of evaluations conducted and by whom, as well as the results of evaluations, including programme evaluation by participants; and assessing the use of new skills by participants, including the use of tracer studies of participants. It would be essential to identify changes made in programmes as a result of evaluation;

(f) Assess teaching methods of instructions (lectures, seminars, workshops, distance learning, research projects, internships, etc.);

(g) Explore partnerships and cooperative links, including the extent and processes used to achieve effective and ongoing interorganizational cooperation.

21. Since training programmes accumulate vast amounts of data on participants, teaching techniques, financial support, administrative practices and other subjects it would be useful if those data were used more systematically to assess the effectiveness of various programmes and the factors determining success. Such an analysis could yield important insights into the transmission of skills and knowledge in a cross-cultural setting and facilitate research to help enhance the impact of training through improved methodologies and curriculum content. It would also serve to further broader cooperation.

22. Both the UNITAR survey and the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, "Training institutions in the United Nations system: programme and activities" (A/52/559, annex) point to the desirability of establishing a clearing-house function within the United Nations system to provide governmental officials with a central reference point for information on training opportunities. This could take, in the first instance, the form of a simple electronic catalogue, periodically updated, of all training offered within the United Nations system for government-sponsored personnel and other relevant personnel. Such a catalogue should be accessible

through the Internet. The UNITAR survey serves as a useful step in that direction.

23. The availability of more comprehensive information on training activities and capabilities within the United Nations system would also be of great value within the system itself. It would make it possible for the funds and programmes of the United Nations as well as United Nations agencies to benefit more from the training opportunities available within the system, or at least contemplate using them before addressing private consultants. The Joint Inspection Unit suggested this to the United Nations Office for Project Services (A/53/778). Much remains to be analysed and accomplished in this respect.

V. Some future policy directions

24. Training should be regarded as a vital and expanding part of United Nations activities. Improving individual skills and building institutions in developing countries and countries with economies in transition are increasingly important elements in international cooperation.

25. In a rapidly changing world, with new challenges and opportunities arising almost on a continuous basis within the context of global competition and rapid communication, training, learning and capacity-building take on increasing relevance. The United Nations should continue to play a key role in offering specialized workshops and seminars, and other learning opportunities to national officials.

26. In proceeding with this aim, the United Nations should continue to adapt and improve programmes, by using the considerable experience and results of all organizations in the system. A more coherent and comprehensive approach to planning and organizing learning for governmental officials is desirable. It should be based on a clear determination of the demand for training by Governments, followed by the creation of a more stable financial base for the programmes. Linkages among outside training efforts should be explored, whenever possible.

27. As part of the effort to enhance cost-effectiveness in meeting Governments' requirements, training should, whenever possible, be provided within the countries concerned to reach a critical mass of participants and to reduce costs. A focus on reaching trainers within the countries concerned also helps to create momentum through a multiplier effect; some steps in this regard have been taken, but more could be done.

28. Within the United Nations system, the aim should be to ensure that the activities and capabilities of the relevant organizations are made to reinforce each other in meeting Governments' training needs. This implies not only that cooperative links among learning programmes in the same broad fields should be systematized and become standard operating procedures. It also requires a renewed effort at fostering greater synergies between normative and research work and training activities.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 14* (A/53/14), paras. 23-26. For the results of the survey, see the UNITAR Web site (www.unitar.org).

[2] See paras. 263-271 and *Action 29*.